



The Quest

Eternity

Tomb Sculpture of Ancient China



The Cleveland January 15, 1988

Museum of Art

February 10- TOMB SCULPTURE OF ANCIENT CHINA: THE QUEST FOR ETERNITY
February 10 - April 10, 1988

April 10, 1988

A major loan exhibition of ceramic sculpture excavated during the past thirty-five years from ancient tombs in the People's Republic of China will be on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from February 10 through April 10, 1988. The exhibition, entitled *Tomb Sculpture of Ancient China: The Quest for Eternity*, presents more than 150 ceramic figures of warriors, servants, court ladies, entertainers, animals, and models of earthly possessions. All had been buried with nobility or officials to protect, serve, or amuse them in the afterlife.

The exhibition is the first in the West to survey the development of Chinese ceramic funerary sculpture from the Neolithic period (c. 8000-2000 B.C.) through the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644). The sculptures, chosen from fourteen museums and cultural institutions in China, are of great artistic as well as historical significance and a rich source of information about the daily life, customs, and beliefs of the Chinese over many centuries.

Burials of the Neolithic period contain provisions for the deceased, suggesting that these ancient people held some belief in a life after death. Excavators of Shang dynasty (c. 1550-1050 B.C.) tombs have found the remains of sacrificial victims--human beings and animals--that were buried with their masters to attend them in the afterlife, together with ceramic models of people and animals. During the Zhou dynasty (c. 1050-256 B.C.), the practice of human and animal sacrifice was gradually

11150 East Blvd.

Cleveland

Ohio 44106

216-421-7340



2- quest for eternity

abandoned and ceramic replicas took the place of living offerings. While beautifully crafted grave offerings were signs of respect and concern for the dead, they also proclaimed the status of the deceased and his family, who, according to ancient texts, sought to appease the departed spirit in return for heavenly favors.

The most imposing sculptures in this show are three remarkably lifelike warriors and a horse, all life-sized. They are part of an army of 7,000 life-sized terra-cotta figures found in 1974 near the mausoleum of the first emperor of the Qin dynasty, who unified China in 221 B.C. The discovery of these extraordinarily crafted and realistically modeled figures radically changed previously held ideas about the scale, technological sophistication, and expressive power of early Chinese ceramic art.

During the succeeding Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), tomb figures of smaller size were produced in great quantity as elaborate funeral arrangements became widespread. From the tombs of Han dynasty rulers come painted earthenware warriors, mounted cavalrymen, and male and female servants; and from the tombs of wealthy landowners, models of buildings, ponds, fields, and farm animals. An animated figure of a balladeer, who performs an energetic dance while singing and beating a drum, is a particularly engaging work. Entertainers appear among the sculptures of almost every period, reflecting the importance of the performing arts in Chinese culture.

The ceramic figures produced during the prosperous Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907), when goods and ideas flowed freely between China and other countries, are celebrated for their beauty and realism. Sensitively modeled, and often enhanced with multicolor glazes, they include representations of spirited horses and fashionable court ladies, the camels and foreign visitors

3- quest for eternity

that traveled the trade routes between China and the West, and imaginative renderings of fierce tomb guardians.

In the funeral rites of subsequent dynasties, ceramic sculptures were generally replaced by wooden models or paper effigies, which when burned were believed to be carried by smoke into the afterworld. Nevertheless, some wealthy Chinese continued to commission ceramic sculptures for their tombs, as evidenced by the number of fine works in this exhibition which date from the Song, Jin, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. Of particular interest are the earthenware figures produced under the Mongol conquerors of the Yuan dynasty, distinguished by their non-Chinese features and clothing, and four Ming dynasty porcelain figures, including a musician with a trumpet, which are decorated with rich blue and turquoise glazes.

Cleveland is the final stop of the four-city American tour of this exhibition, which was shown earlier in Philadelphia, Houston, and Los Angeles. The exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in collaboration with the Overseas Archaeological Exhibition Corporation, the People's Republic of China. The American tour was made possible with the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. The Cleveland showing, assisted by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council, is made possible by BP America.

Admission to The Cleveland Museum of Art and the exhibition is free.

A 30-minute recorded tour, available at the entrance to the exhibition for \$3 per person, guides the visitor, with a cassette player and earphones, through the highlights of the exhibition. Groups of fifteen or more making advance reservations for this tour through the Museum's Education Department (421-7340, ext. 464) will receive a reduced rate of \$2.50 per person.

4- quest for eternity

A fully illustrated catalogue of the exhibition containing essays on Chinese funerary customs, architecture, and sculpture is available from the Museum's Bookstore in a paperbound edition at \$19.95 or in hard cover at \$35.00.

Two smaller exhibitions of Chinese art, organized by The Cleveland Museum of Art primarily from its own collections, complement the loan exhibition of tomb sculpture. **Realm of the Immortals: Daoism in the Arts of China**, which runs concurrently with the major exhibition, and **Treasures for the Yellow Springs**, on view from February 2 through April 24, are described in separate press releases.

Schedules of free lectures, gallery talks, films, music programs, and other events related to these exhibitions are also enclosed.

#

For additional information, photographs, or color slides, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.